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## **Voters think taxes need to be raised to trim budget gap**

By Ed Mendel  
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SACRAMENTO – By a narrow margin, voters think taxes will have to be raised to close a state budget shortfall estimated to be \$14 billion, according to a new statewide Field Poll.

But that belief was held by less than a majority, 48 percent to 43 percent.

In 2003, the last time the state faced a large budget shortfall, the Field Poll found a wider margin of voters thought a tax increase would be needed, 53 percent to 37 percent.

The tax question this year produced a nearly identical split, in reverse, between voters in the two major parties. Democrats said a tax increase will be needed, 54 percent to 37 percent. Republicans said no tax increase, 55 percent to 36 percent.

“It's almost a defining element of what makes a conservative and a liberal – your posture on taxes,” said Mark DiCamillo, the Field Poll research director.

Voters who identified themselves as liberal said taxes will have to be raised to resolve the deficit, 62 percent to 29 percent. Conservatives said a tax increase is not needed, 63 percent to 30 percent.

A slight majority of middle-of-the-road voters think taxes will have to be raised, 51 percent to 39 percent.

Taxes could be a central issue for lawmakers after Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger proposes a budget Jan. 10.

Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez, D-Los Angeles, has said support for a tax increase may grow when the public is told of the harm deep cuts would do to education, social services and other programs.

Republican lawmakers vow to block any tax increase.

The poll showed views of the level of taxes is similar to polls in 2000 and 2001: much too high, 29 percent; somewhat high, 28 percent; about right, 33 percent; low, 6 percent; no opinion, 4 percent.

The Tax Foundation, a nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C., ranks the state and local tax burden in California 12th among states in 2007 and eighth when adjusted for federal taxes.

The poll found that Schwarzenegger continues to have a high approval rating for job performance, 60 percent. His rating peaked at 65 percent in 2004, then fell to 36 percent in August 2005 during his unsuccessful campaign for four “Year of Reform” initiatives.

The Legislature's approval rating is 39 percent, up from 26 percent in May. By the end of 2006, lawmakers had passed high-profile bills on global warming, prescription drugs, raising the minimum wage and public-works bonds.

The poll found that voters by a 14-point margin have more confidence in Schwarzenegger than the Legislature to “do what is right” on the deficit.

The overall poll, conducted Dec. 10-17, was based on a survey of 1,283 registered voters and has a margin of error of 2.9 percentage points. The margin of error is higher for results of subgroups.